Resurrecting Limited War Theory

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Limited war and its emphasis on the deliberate limitation of the objectives sought in a conflict differs sharply with its counterpart total war, which demands unlimited objectives. The distinction between these two forms of war can be traced through notable military theorists throughout history, including Carl von Clausewitz and Sir Julian Corbett. The thread common among all the theorists is the understanding that it is the limitation of the objectives, or ends, rather than the limitation of the means applied in waging war, that determines the limited nature of a conflict.

United States limited wars in Korea and the Vietnam, as well as conflicts involving other nations, to include China, Israel, reveal common challenges and provide lessons for the implementation of limited war strategies. These include the requirement for clearly articulated political objectives, the communication of those limited objectives to one's adversary, and the need for force structuring to balance limited war and total war capabilities.

Limited war is not the only way, but a way to wage modern war. The intent for this paper is to resurrect, or re-introduce, the theory of limited war into discourse concerning United States security policy and military planning at the political and strategic levels. This is necessary not only because of the potential for the United States to be directly involved, but also for the likelihood that conflict between other nations may require the United States to act indirectly with an appreciation of the principles and guidelines for limited war.

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Abstract

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Introduction

> No one starts a war--or rather no one in his senses ought to do so--without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war and how he intends to conduct it. The former is its political purpose, the later its operational objective.[1]
>
> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*

War is, above all, a political choice. It is distinguishable from mere violence for violence sake by its close association with the struggle of opposing political wills and the decisions made by political leaders to enter and terminate conflict. Political leaders, whether democratically elected or set in place by birthright, committee, coup, or charisma are responsible for making the decision to wage war and for what purpose or objective the war will be fought for. They are also responsible for terminating the war once that objective has been achieved, or when the war's objective is no longer tenable.

Once the decision has been made to fight a war, subsequent decisions on how the war will be fought and the desired end state at termination must be considered. This is the classical ends, ways, and means balancing necessary to ensure success in waging war. The end state gives rise to the objectives sought for the conflict, which must, in turn, be balanced with the means available to wage the war. The way in which the means will be employed to achieve the objectives constitutes the strategy to be employed by the belligerent to achieve their end state. Strategy is defined in Army Field Manual 1-02, *Operational Terms and Graphics*, as "the art and science of developing and employing instruments of national power in a synchronized and integrated fashion to achieve theater, national and/or multinational objectives."[2] This paper will focus on the American military instrument of power employed in a strategy of limited war as an alternative to the strategy of total war.

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[1]Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Trans. and ed. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 579.

[2]U.S. Department of Defense, Army Field Manual 1-02, *Operational Terms and Graphics* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2004), 1-178.

Limited war has been defined as war "in which the belligerents restrict the purposes for which they fight to concrete, well-defined objectives that do not demand the utmost effort of which the belligerents are capable and that can be accommodated in a negotiated settlement."[3] Limited war is about influence and persuasion through the use of military force, and denotes a strategy aimed at affecting an adversary's will, rather than crushing that will or destroying his military capabilities. The desired effect is to create the conditions where continued resistance is determined to be less attractive than granting the desired concessions to one's opponent.

Limited war is sharply contrasted with total war, which has been defined as a "distinct twentieth–century species of unlimited war in which all the human and material resources of the belligerents are mobilized and employed against the total national life of the enemy."[4] Total war is fought for unlimited objectives that ultimately threaten the survival of the state itself or a regime in power. The totality of these objectives severely constrains the effective political control of the intensity, scope, and destructiveness of the conflict. The only limiting factor in total war is defined by the finite capacities in men, material, and technologies possessed by the belligerents to destroy their enemy's ability to resist.[5]

The world has experienced few total wars in modern time, with the First and Second World Wars being generally accepted as the exceptions to this rule. Beyond these two examples, wars have tended to be limited in their nature, whether initially designed in this way, or altered from their initial total war construct. Recent conflicts involving the United States of America run contrary to this trend.

The United States' wars against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 2001, and against Saddam Hussein in Iraq in 2003, were fought under total war constructs, which required the

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[3]Robert E. Osgood, *Limited War: The Challenge to American Strategy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 2-3.

[4]Ibid., 3.

[5]Ibid., 2-4.

removal of the ruling regime and the complete destruction of the adversary's military capability to resist. These total war objectives clearly defined the termination of the conflict with the unconditional surrender of the enemy. There were no capitulation ceremonies for either Afghanistan or Iraq, and both Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) continue as ongoing conflicts requiring the commitment of U.S. military forces and large financial expenditures for the United States. Both conflicts were initially conducted with limited U.S. military forces in an effort to limit the means employed in toppling the established governments, but these forces were not necessarily well suited for limited war.

This trend of waging war for unlimited objectives using limited forces and means has created an imbalance in the application of U.S. military power. This imbalance, in the application of military force, is due largely to a misconception of the limitation of war by the limiting of means, both the size of forces engaged and the firepower employed, versus the bounding of a conflict by the limitation of the objectives sought by the belligerents. There are three models to categorize limited wars, which include the scale of means, the geographic span of the conflict, and the scope of the objectives sought for the war.[6] The third model, scope of objectives, is the only one that clearly delineates total wars from limited wars.

Distinguishing wars based on the scale of the resources applied to waging the conflict, specifically the quantity, quality, and type of forces, weapons, and material employed is inadequate for the purposes of characterizing a war as limited. This model concentrates solely on the means employed, rather than all means available to the belligerents to wage the war. Focusing on the scale of means must also consider the destructive capability of the weapons used.[7] This focus was instrumental in the development of the U.S. strategy of limited war during the Cold War period, as both superpowers attempted to reduce the potential for escalation to total nuclear

[6]Ibid.

[7]Ibid., 4.

war.[8] The view that the magnitude or destructiveness of weapons distinguishes limited or total wars is undermined by the possibility of waging total war with rudimentary weapons.[9]

Characterizing wars, as limited by the geographic span of the conflict, is also unconstructive. With this view, total war is distinguished from limited war by the extent of territory or the number of states involved in the conflict. With geographic span as the differentiator, a limited war would involve local conflicts, to include internal or civil wars, and conflict between bordering states, with total war encompassing an entire continent, region, or larger theater of war. The geographic span serves more to determine the potential means available to fight the war than it does to determine a war's strategy. Classifying wars as limited based on their geographic territory runs contrary to the idea that war cannot be limited at the local level. For those directly involved with the physical fighting of a war, there can be no such thing as limited war.[10]

The scope of the political objectives, whether limited or unlimited in their nature, is essential in distinguishing between total and limited war. Under the scope model, wars are total if their objectives are total in their nature, requiring either the complete destruction of the enemy or their unconditional surrender, and they are limited if they are deliberately fought for limited objectives short of the adversary's complete defeat and subjugation.[11] The scope of objectives is a determinate element for both the scale of means and the geographic span of a war. If the objectives for a conflict are limited in nature, the means employed to wage the war will also be limited. The limitation of the objectives sought in a conflict limits the scale and the span of a conflict, and preservers the political nature of the war itself. For this reason, this third view, scope

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[8]Adrian R. Lewis, *The American Culture of War* (New York: Routledge, Taylor, and Francis Group, 2007), 201-210.

[9]Osgood, *Limited War*, 3.

[10]Ibid., 4.

[11]Ibid.

of objectives, provides the most useful delineation of wars as limited or total. This view also supports the definition of limited war as "war fought for restricted, well-defined objectives that do not demand the utmost military effort by the belligerents allowing for a negotiated settlement to end the conflict."[12]

The concepts of limited war theory and strategy continue to have relevance in the application of U.S. military power in the 21st Century. This relevance is predicated on an understanding of the requirement to limit the desired political objectives and to ensure that a military capability to achieve those limited objectives exists. The implementation of limited war strategies will require a fundamental change in the expectations of the American populace with regards to the utility of U.S. military power, and a cultural transformation within the American military itself. There are additional implications for the international community if the U.S. chooses to wage limited wars in response to current and emerging threats.

Unfortunately, writings and debate over limited war theory have been deficient since the end of the Cold War, with the last book dedicated to the theory being William V. O'Brien's, *The Conduct of Just and Limited War*, published in 1981. The U.S. Army's newly published capstone Field Manual 3-0, *Operations*, briefly discusses "Limited Interventions" as part of full spectrum operations, but emphasizes the operational and tactical mission sets rather than the theory or a strategy of limited war.[13] The intent for this paper is to resurrect, or re-introduce, the theory of limited war into discussions concerning U.S. security policy and military planning at the political and strategic levels. This is necessary to provide both political and military leaders with alternatives to the current trend in American conflicts being fought as total wars. Limited war strategies are not to be seen as "the way," but rather "a way" of confronting the challenges of

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[12]Ibid., 1-2.

[13]U.S. Department of Defense, U.S. Army Field Manual 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2008), 2-7.

modern conflict. Additionally, the potential for limited wars to be fought amongst other nations makes it all the more important for limited war concepts to be appreciated prior to the U.S. becoming directly or indirectly involved.

This paper examines the theory of limited war and the development of that theory into a strategy of limited war for the United States. The ideas and concepts of five leading limited war theorists show a progression from Carl von Clausewitz's natural moderation of war into an articulated theory of limited war, and the expansion of that theory into a strategy of limited war. William V. O'Brien's guidelines for limited war written during the Cold War period will be used to scrutinize the American use of limited war strategy since the articulation of that strategy, and to identify common themes of success and failure in implementing those guidelines.[14] The Sino-Vietnamese War of 1979 and the 2006 Israeli War against Hezbollah in Southern Lebanon are referenced to provide a non-U.S. perspective on limited war, and an emerging limited war doctrine for the Indian Army demonstrates the relevance and challenges of limited war in the current operational environment. Finally, conclusions are made concerning the need for consideration of limited war strategies in U.S. security policy, and the subsequent requirements to ensure the success of those strategies in future conflicts

Limited War Theory

> No American can fail to be interested in knowing the nature and characteristics of these limited wars, given that they dominate the periods of peace that we long for, and the war that we hope to avoid.[15]
>
> General Maxwell Taylor, *The Uncertain Trumpet*

Limited war developed beyond the physical and technological limitations of waging war to a theory and strategy of self-imposed limitation in the application of military force through the work of theorists from the early 1800s through the Cold War period. Several themes throughout

[14]O'Brien, 222-234.

[15]Maxwell, D. Taylor, *The Uncertain Trumpet* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), 6-7.

this history have remained constant despite changes in weapons technology and the world's ever shifting geopolitical environment. The common themes are the condition of political dominance over the objectives in war, the requirement to limit those political objectives, and the necessity for limited war force capabilities to wage limited war. Carl von Clausewitz is the first military theorist to introduce these concepts and to articulate a theory of limited war that served as a foundation for other theorists to build upon.

Carl von Clausewitz

Prussian theorist Carl von Clausewitz's military career spanned the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars from 1792 to 1815. The predominant themes of his treatise, *On War*, were the concepts of war as a political instrument and the idea of war as a duel or struggle between opposing wills.[16] Clausewitz writes, "War is an instrument of policy. It must necessarily bear the character of policy itself, which takes up the sword in place of the pen, but does not on that account cease to think according to its own laws."[17]

The majority of Clausewitz's manuscript focuses heavily on his original ideas that establish the complete defeat of the enemy as the primary military objective of any war. His military experience and reflective observations on the instrument of war in Napoleon Bonaparte's hands led him to conclude that war fought for the unlimited objective of the complete defeat of the enemy approached what he called war's "absolute form."[18] Clausewitz explains the disparity between his theoretical extreme of "absolute" war, and its true form of war, "real war" by introducing modifying or moderating tendencies in war. These modifying factors included the ideas that war is never an isolated act, but rather influenced by political forces, that war is not

[16]Clausewitz, 80-81.

[17]Ibid., 610.

[18]Ibid., 579-581.

settled by a single short blow, but rather a series of successive acts, or operations, and, finally, the result or outcome of a war is never final.[19]

In adjusting his view of the military objective, Clausewitz introduces the potential for limited aims or objectives in war.[20] He explains the gap between the anticipated maximum exertion by the belligerents engaged in the struggle and the actual tendency for them to adopt a middle course as example of their willingness to limit not only their efforts by their military objectives as well.[21] Clausewitz concedes that the "conquest of the whole of the enemy's territory is not always necessary" and that there are circumstances when "a country's total occupation may not be enough" to produce a victory that leads to peace.[22]

Clausewitz introduces a theory of limited war and provides the foundational concepts of political primacy, the interaction of contesting wills, and the identification of unlimited and limited war by the objectives or the aims for the war. These concepts were broadened by Sir Julian Corbett in 1911.

Sir Julian Corbett

British maritime strategist and military theorist Sir Julian Corbett advanced the theory of limited war drawing heavily from Clausewitz's work, but he introduced a maritime aspect from the British colonial wars of the 19th Century. Clausewitz's work had been critiqued for lacking this naval perspective. Corbett insisted that maritime theory and strategy could not be separated from the larger theory of war in general. He delineated maritime strategy as a "minor strategy" that served the "major strategy," or grand strategy concerned with the political objectives in war, echoing Clausewitz's principle of political primacy. Like Clausewitz, he was also a student of

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[19]Ibid., 78-81.

[20]Ibid., 601-604.

[21]Ibid., 602.

[22]Ibid., 595.

Napoleon's campaigns, but concluded that, "the fruit of the Napoleonic period was not a single absolute idea, but based on the distinction of limited and unlimited efforts."[23]

Corbett believed that a strategy of limited war had inherent strengths when associated with an island nation possessing a powerful navy, like that of the Royal Navy. Being an island nation prevented other states from attacking the homeland as long as the navy controlled the ocean approaches. A powerful navy also limited the amount of force that friendly land forces would have to deal with by preventing an adversary from introducing additional land forces by landing from the sea.[24] Limited war was not to be fought for permanent conquest, but in an effort to disturb an adversary's plans or to strengthen one's own political position.

Limited war, according to Corbett, was to be fought in two distinct stages. The first stage, or "territorial stage," is an initial offensive that culminates with the seizure of a small, inconsequential territory of the adversary that is geographically isolated, preferably by open oceans. The second stage involves a temporary defensive to attenuate a counter-offensive by the adversary with the aim to retake the territory now occupied. This temporary defense is combined with continued pressure on the adversary to convince him to concede to the desired limited political objective. This capitulation is simplified by the relative insignificance of the territory in dispute, as compared with the effort that would be required to retake it. In contrast, Corbett cautioned against seizing "organic" territories of the adversary or the homeland itself, given that this would produce an unlimited effort by the adversary to retain it.[25]

Along with discussing a proposed strategy for limited war, Corbett discusses the continued utility of total war with unlimited objectives. On the subject of total, or unlimited, wars, Corbett likened this to taking the higher, or more difficult, road but that this was sometimes

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[23]Sir Julian Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*. Introduction by Eric J. Grove (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1988), 43-44.

[24]Ibid., 52-59.

[25]Ibid., 41-51.

a necessity, particularly in continental wars where the belligerents share a common border. He writes that one should "keep that type and method before you to use when you can or when you must."[26] He believed that each strategy of war, total and limited, could be used under their proper circumstances. Corbett's writings support the Clausewitzian concepts of political primacy and unlimited and limited objectives, and he introduces the concept of applying military pressure or force to compel negotiation or capitulation by the adversary.

Dr. Robert E. Osgood

The evolution of limited war theory gathered momentum during the post-nuclear era with the concern that war might finally achieve Clausewitz's "absolute" form, given the destructive capabilities of atomic weapons. Political negotiations became key with the advent of nuclear weapons and the resultant Cold War between the Soviet Union and the Western powers. Following World War II, the U.S. was faced with countering the emerging threat of Soviet expansionism with a reduction in military spending and manpower. This balance required a new strategy that would require fewer military forces to achieve the nation's strategic objectives. President Dwight D. Eisenhower chose to counter the Soviet threat with nuclear weapons in a policy known as "Massive Retaliation."[27]

Beyond the point of nuclear parity between the superpowers and a credible second response capability, the U.S. adopted a policy of massive retaliation, which promised deterrence of the Soviets through the threat of an overmatching nuclear reaction to counter any Soviet aggression. The response of the Soviets was to threaten a reaction in kind that would produce what would eventually become known as mutually assured destruction (MAD). The destruction created by full nuclear release by both superpowers left little to be victorious over if total war

[26]Ibid., 77-78.

[27]Lewis, 201-227.

occurred. Following the Korean War, it became clear that both the U.S and Soviet military theorists understood the necessity of limiting the potential for nuclear war. The deterrent value of nuclear weapons remained valuable in balancing the superpower states and provided a fail safe against total conventional war. However, this also opened the door to smaller, more numerous, limited conflicts where the two states could compete for power and influence on the global stage.[28] American concepts about limited war matured during the 1950s into the creation of a strategy of limited war with the introduction of academics into the once sacrosanct defense community dominated by active and retired military officers.[29] Political scientist Robert E. Osgood was a leading American academic who advocated a limited war strategy for the United States in the post-nuclear era.

Osgood provided two basic rules that were fundamental in fighting a successful limited war. The first rule was that the belligerents be prepared to conduct war in accordance with well-defined, limited political objectives, and be willing to accommodate the objectives of their adversary. In this respect, Osgood agrees with the political primacy, but advances the concept of using force to promote negotiations.[30] His second rule is that the belligerents be willing to limit the means employed towards these limited objectives. This point was key given that total war was still possible with limited technological means. Osgood evoked the example of ancient Rome when he relates, "Rome did not need nuclear bombs to annihilate Carthage."[31] He added that the belligerents in any conflict were free to follow or violate these rules as they saw fit.

Following the United States' experience in Vietnam in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Osgood re-evaluated his original work on limited war and focused on the potential impact of the

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[28]Ibid., 201-227.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Osgood, *Limited War*, 14-19.

[31]Osgood, *Limited War*, 3.

American populace in waging limited war. He was troubled by American cultural attitudes towards the nature of war and the relationship between the use of limited war strategies and the potential for conflicts of longer duration. He believed that Americans found it difficult to use military power as a rational instrument of power, preferring to achieve quick decisive victories while avoiding significant casualties. Dr. Osgood sought to change the American mindset concerning limited wars through his writings in order to bring them in line with the potential of limited war strategy.[32]

GEN Maxwell D. Taylor

General Maxwell D. Taylor served as Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army from 1955 until 1959 and was influenced by the writings of Dr. Osgood. He was also an outspoken critic of the Eisenhower Administration's policy of massive retaliation and its correlated "New Look" policies for the U.S. military. The new look programs sought to realign the force structures of the military services towards a reliance on nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles in preparation for a war with the Soviet Union.[33]

In the eyes of General Taylor, massive retaliation was a stillborn strategy that had failed in the Korean War, and this failure required the U.S. to reconsider its strategy for the Cold War. The U.S. had lost its monopoly on nuclear weapons, and the continuing existence of limited wars like Korea exposed a gap between the need for forces capable of fighting limited wars and their existence or availability. In General Taylor's words, nuclear weapons might be "sufficient to deter a Great War, but would not maintain the Little Peace."[34] Any new strategy would have to deter general, or total, war with the Soviets, while deterring or quickly winning limited wars.

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[32]Robert E. Osgood, *Limited War Revisited* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1979), 11-14.

[33]Taylor, 23-46, 56-65.

[34]Taylor, 1-11.

General Taylor proposed an alternative strategy to massive retaliation, which he called "Flexible Response." Flexible Response called for balancing capabilities within the military's force structure to deter both nuclear and conventional threats.[35] He also stressed that limited war had the expressed objective of promoting a political solution to any conflict. Limited war's nature was "to stress the diplomacy of force, rather than the force of diplomacy."[36]

General Taylor's primary contribution to limited war theory is the concept of matching limited war military capabilities to limited war strategy. Flexible Response was designed to allow the U.S. to possess capabilities not only to meet the Soviet nuclear threat, but also to fight in smaller, limited wars on the periphery. As Chief of Staff of the Army, he continued to resist efforts to "maximize air power and minimize the footsoldier,"[37] arguing that the downward trend in ground forces, particularly in Western Europe, would signal a lack of resolution to defend U.S. allies, and would risk the U.S. blundering into a total war with the Soviets.[38] This was an important argument in the escalation theory debate of the Cold War period. Escalation required that there be intermediate steps in a "ladder" of escalation that would allow the superpowers to escalate the conflict gradually, avoiding full nuclear release at the onset of conflict. Additionally, General Taylor recommended the formation of a "joint headquarters, similar to the Strategic Air Force, to be charged with joint planning, training, and transport of all forces of all services earmarked for possible use in limited war."[39] He also recommended an increase in strategic mobility and logistics capabilities to support limited war forces anywhere in the world.

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[35]Taylor, 130-164.

[36]Ibid.

[37]Ibid.

[38]Ibid.

[39]Ibid., 142-164.

William V. O'Brien

The American military theorist, William V. O'Brien, wrote during the later half of the Cold War and experienced the stability created by the use of a limited war strategy to counter the Soviet threat. He drew on the writings of Clausewitz, Osgood, and Taylor but applied them within the context of the stabilized conditions of Cold War détente. Limited wars had allowed the superpowers to avoid direct confrontation and had reduced the potential for escalation to total nuclear war. O'Brien outlined what he called "guidelines for limited war" in his book, *The Conduct of Just and Limited War*. These guidelines included the necessity for political primacy and control over the military instrument of power, the use of limited objectives, economy in the application of military force, the voluntary adherence to the established rules of the conflict, and the capability of flexible response based on a broad spectrum of capabilities that would allow belligerents to avoid abrupt escalation.[40]

O'Brien's first guideline, political primacy and control over the military instrument, means that armed violence is permissible as long as it is in pursuit of state sanctioned objectives, and as long as those objectives are set by civilian leadership. This civilian control is seen as a safeguard against what O'Brien regards as the military's "notorious" habit of escaping control and pursuing their own ends with the application of military force.[41]

His second guideline is the limitation of objectives to be achieved in the use of a limited war strategy. This is to avoid broad, nebulous objectives that could possibly keep the state at war indefinitely. The limiting of objectives is also to prevent the escalation of a limited war into a total war fought for unlimited goals with unlimited means--read as total nuclear war and mutually assured destruction.[42]

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[40]O'Brien, 222-223.

[41]Ibid., 223-224.

[42]Ibid., 224-225.

O'Brien's third guideline, economy of force and proportionality, also prevents the escalation of a limited war. Resources for any state are limited and they must be directed at the primary objective of the war if they are used judiciously.[43] This principle is anchored with Clausewitz's moderating tendency of war where the belligerents are only willing to use the force that is necessary to achieve their aim and impose their will. Maintaining proportionality in the use of force ensures that the conflict remains limited in nature.

The fourth guideline, voluntary, self-imposed rules, contains several sub-guidelines to follow. These include the requirement for communication between the belligerents with regards to the explicit and implicit rules of the conflict, the avoidance of direct confrontation between the superpowers, no use of nuclear weapons, geographical confinement of the conflict, mutual claim by the belligerents of the legality of the conflict, limited mobilization of the state, restraint observed in the use of the psychological instrument, the use of fight-and-negotiate strategies, and the introduction of third parties or international organizations to mediate the conflict.[44] O'Brien's guidelines were written for the Cold War period and focused accordingly; however, these rules help to promote the limited nature of any conflict by constraining the means employed and by facilitating the cessation of the violence.

Lastly, O'Brien's fifth guideline, flexible response capabilities, allows the belligerents to scale the "escalation ladder" at smaller steps, rather than moving quickly to the use of nuclear weapons.[45] The concept of signaling with military force is encompassed in this idea and works well when joined with the voluntary, self-imposed rule of communication between the belligerents.

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[43]Ibid., 225-228.

[44]Ibid., 228-233.

[45]Ibid., 233-234.

Although written with a focus towards limiting the potential for nuclear war, O'Brien's guidelines are applicable to other limited wars. His guidelines serve as a helpful tool for analyzing American involvement in conflicts as successful or unsuccessful in the application of limited war strategy. In the next section, O'Brien's guidelines will be used to analyze the American use of limited war strategy in historical cases of the Korean War and the Vietnam War, as well as ongoing operations in Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Limited War Guidelines

> One mistake that we avoided in Korea was an insistence on "total victory" or "unconditional surrender" before talking peace. But in light of many of the slogans that fill the air and the public prints nowadays, I am moved to wonder if all our citizens have come to understand the concept of limited war. A limited war is not merely a small war that has not yet grown to full size. It is a war in which the objectives are specifically limited in light of our national interest and our current capabilities.[46]
>
> General Matthew Ridgway,
> *The American Culture of War*

O'Brien's guidelines for limited war, grounded in the threads common throughout the development of limited war theory, have been alternatively adhered to or ignored in the application of American military force, coincidentally producing success and failure in conflicts since the Second World War. The United States fought both the Korean War and the Vietnam War with limited war strategies, with the Korean War being considered a model limited war, and the Vietnam War considered a failure. An abbreviated history of the conflicts allows for the analysis of O'Brien's guidelines at the political and strategic levels.

Succeeding at Limited War--The U.S. in Korea

The North Korean invasion of South Korea in June of 1950, produced a reaction by the United States that was unanticipated by the North Koreans and their supporting states, the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. President Harry S. Truman committed U.S. forces to

[46]Lewis, 205.

fight alongside other United Nations contributing nations under a U.N. mandate to restore the Korean border. Force reductions and defense budget cuts following World War II produced U.S. military units who were initially ill prepared and poorly equipped to fight.

The Korean War tested U.S. political-military relationships and threatened to escalate beyond the Korean peninsula with the introduction of Chinese military forces. By January 1951, the U.S. Commander of Forces, General Douglas MacArthur, had been relieved of his command by President Truman, and the conflict had stabilized along its current line of demarcation. The careful balance between the commitment of U.S. conventional forces and the potential for escalation in the conflict was maintained and total war with the United States and China, and nuclear war between the U.S. and the Soviet Union was averted.[47]

The internal struggle between President Truman and his military commander, and MacArthur's subsequent relief, demonstrates the primacy of the political over the military during the Korean War. The war also established the precedent for the civilian control over nuclear weapons rather than military commanders.[48] General MacArthur pushed to escalate the conflict to total war objectives, but President Truman was determined to bound the conflict under the U.N. mandate U.S. and allied forces were acting under.[49] He has been criticized for reducing military pressure prior to armistice negotiations by agreeing to a ceasefire that forced U.S. commanders to halt pressure on the Chinese forces, losing tactical momentum.[50]

The political constraints of the Truman Administration, the requirement to defend Western from Soviet aggression, and the desire to remain within the bounds of the U.N. mandate caused the U.S. to limit its objectives to the defense of and restoration of the sovereignty of South

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[47]Osgood, *Limited War,* 173-178.

[48]O'Brien, 239-242.

[49]Ibid., 248-250.

[50]Ibid., 241.

Korea. This limited objective was violated by General MacArthur's push north in dangerous proximity to the Chinese border. This caused an escalation by the Chinese that proved costly to the American forces and strained the U.N. coalition.[51]

The threat of Soviet expansionism required U.S. military units for the defense of Western Europe and made the economy of military force a necessity during the Korean War. The initial forces committed to Korea were deployed from occupation duty in Japan, arriving ill equipped, poorly trained, and grossly outnumbered by the North Koreans. Task Force Smith has served as an example of U.S. military unpreparedness for generations since the Korean War.[52] The Korean War was also the first test of the U.S. policy of Massive Retaliation, and the conflict proved the strategy problematic.

The U.S. fought in Korea under rules largely imposed by the U.N. mandate that sanctioned U.S. military action. Other rules did develop in the conflict, and these rules were primarily established by the interaction of the U.S., the U.N., and the Chinese. The U.S. self-imposed restrictions on bombing targets within Chinese territory, and this policy drew sharp criticism within the United States. By abstaining from attacking targets inside of China, the U.S. was communicating its intention to limit the conflict to Korea. When additional pressure was required to bring about an end to the conflict, U.S. forces did bomb facilities inside of China to convey U.S. willingness to escalate the conflict if negotiations failed. To prevent escalation to nuclear war with North Korea's nuclear protector, the Soviet Union, U.S. and Soviet public announcements and diplomatic exchanges clearly communicated that neither superpower would use nuclear weapons in the conflict.[53]

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[51]Ibid., 242-243.

[52]Lewis, 91-97.

[53]O'Brien, 244-245.

The U.S. did not commit itself to full national mobilization for the Korean War. There were still considerable stockpiles of war materials remaining from World War II that could be committed, and American public opinion remained war weary and unlikely to support another mobilization, with its associated rationing and disruptions. Additionally, Americans did not perceive the encroachment of communism in far off Korea as a direct threat to the homeland.[54]

The U.S. did not employ the psychological instrument of war during the conflict in Korea. The enemy was not depicted as evil or threatening in propaganda in order to restrict national sentiment about the war and to maintain the objective nature of the U.N. mandate that U.S. forces were fighting under. This limitation of the psychological instrument was necessary to preserve international support, particularly in countries contributing forces to the defense of South Korea. The absence of any concerted psychological campaign at home in America necessitated a swift conclusion to the conflict.[55]

None of the belligerents saw the need to negotiate as long as the battlefields in Korea remained fluid. The eventual stalemate forced the belligerents to negotiate a settlement at Panmunjom. The concept of "fight-and-negotiate" then took another form during negotiations. The conflict occurred with political maneuverings over the issue of prisoner exchanges and repatriation of prisoners of war. O'Brien refers to this as "Prisoner of War Combat," with both sides engaging in accusations of brainwashing and maltreatment of prisoners. The North Koreans refused the return of U.S. prisoners when large numbers of North Korean prisoners of war refused to return to the North, effectively holding the U.S. POW hostages pending the return of their own prisoners. This provided the North Koreans with political leverage at the negotiation table, effectively extending the negotiations of "fight-and-negotiate," without actually ground combat.[56]

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[54]Ibid., 251-252.

[55]Ibid.

[56]Ibid., 253-254.

The United Nations resolution authorizing the United States and its coalition partners to use military force in defense of South Korea effectively neutralized the U.N. as an objective powerbroker and mediator for negotiations to conclude the conflict. The armistice was the product of trilateral talks between the U.S., China, and North Korea. A Neutral Repatriation Commission consisting of delegates from Sweden, Switzerland, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and India mediated the return of prisoners of war and evolved to be the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission given the responsibility for overseeing compliance with the demilitarized zone (DMZ) separating North and South Korea. This commission continues to be largely ineffectual due to the fact that it has no real authority itself, and no authority to turn to for rectifying violations of the armistice.[57]

Failing at Limited War--The U.S. in Vietnam

The United States involvement in the Vietnam War began shortly after the Geneva Accords of 1954, with the introduction of U.S. military advisors to the South Vietnamese Army. The advisor mission was supplemented with military aid to South Vietnam in order to help the South Vietnamese government fight a counterinsurgency against Vietcong irregulars and to deter aggression from North Vietnam. The Gulf of Tonkin incident involving North Vietnamese and U.S. naval vessels triggered bombing missions against North Vietnamese targets. President Lyndon B. Johnson extended these missions into Operation "Rolling Thunder" in 1965, with the intent of halting North Vietnamese aggression against the South.[58]

Varied strategies were employed at the operational level to strengthen the South Vietnamese military and to limit the capabilities of the Vietcong guerrilla. These included search and destroy missions, pacification of the local populace, and air interdiction of North Vietnamese

[57]Ibid., 254-256.

[58]Lewis, 229-248.

run supply routes and safe havens in Laos and Cambodia. Despite tactical and operational successes, the U.S. was unable to win strategically partly due to a lack of U.S. will to attack into North Vietnam. President Johnson and Secretary of Defense Robert Macnamara sought to avoid escalating the war by limiting the commitment of the necessary resources to win the war.

In 1968, the North Vietnamese conducted a coordinated attack with Vietcong irregulars and the North Vietnamese Army (NVA). Although a tactical success for the U.S. and South Vietnamese forces, the Tet Offensive turned the tide of American popular opinion against the war, denying the public support necessary to continue the commitment of U.S. forces. A change in strategy to a policy of "Vietnamization" concentrated U.S. efforts to building up South Vietnamese military capabilities in order to enable U.S. forces to pull out of direct confrontation on the battlefield. Following the American withdrawal, North Vietnam invaded South Vietnam in 1972, with conventional NVA forces. President Richard Nixon authorized bombing missions inside of North Vietnam, stalling the invasion, and bringing the North Vietnamese back to the negotiation table in 1973. The negotiated peace settlement proved ineffectual when the NVA invaded again in 1975, unifying the country under communist rule following the collapse of the South Vietnamese military and government.[59]

There was less concern that the conflict in Vietnam might escalate to total war, particularly nuclear war with the Soviet Union or China, due to the stabilizing nature of policies threatening massive retaliation and a status quo, which had developed in the later half of the Cold War. This allowed the superpowers to compete with each other on a limited scale within the confines of Vietnam and her bordering countries. It was understood that the conflict was part of the larger political conflict between the U.S. and the Soviets. Both the Johnson and the Nixon

[59]Ibid., 265-293.

Administrations publicly espoused a "no-wider-war" policy, clearly defining the conflict as limited in nature.[60]

U.S. political leaders desired a political settlement with the North Vietnamese, and they placed restrictions on the timing of and the selection of bombing targets to meet this end. U.S. military leaders criticized these restrictions for reducing pressure on the North Vietnamese and placing the U.S. in a position of weakness during negotiations. It was only after President Nixon released these restrictions in Operation Linebacker and applied significant force that the U.S. was able to regain the advantage.[61] The primacy of the political was maintained in Vietnam, arguably to the detriment of military operations.

United States objectives in Vietnam were initially limited to the defense of Vietnam from external and internal armed aggression. These objectives grew to include the change of and support of a new South Vietnamese government, the denial of Vietcong sanctuaries and supply lines in Laos, and the prevention of what became known as the "domino effect" within Southeast Asia. This broadening of objectives also saw an increase in the means employed, both manpower and firepower to accomplish the expanded objectives.[62] This expansion of objectives violated the clearly defined and limited objectives requirement for waging limited wars.

The U.S. also violated the guideline of economy of force in the Vietnam War. Unlike the Korean War, Vietnam was not constrained by forces available to wage the war. The threat of mutually assured destruction and the potential use of tactical nuclear weapons in the defense of Western Europe allowed the U.S. to shift its forces from other locales to the theater of Vietnam. Additionally, the U.S. had an abundance of manpower available through the draft, which remained in effect following the Korean War. This abundance allowed the U.S. to maintain a

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[60]O'Brien, 257-260.

[61]Ibid., 260-261.

[62]Ibid.

conventional, manpower heavy mindset towards a conflict fundamentally unconventional in nature.[63] New weapons systems, to include precision guided munitions, also allowed for the employment of greater, more lethal, firepower beneath the threshold of tactical nuclear weapons.

The U.S. fought the Vietnam War with unilaterally self-imposed rules, which proved disadvantageous to its prosecution of the war. There were no formal negotiations with North Vietnam until the latter half of the conflict, with both belligerents choosing to communicate through escalation of the conflict with increased force or loosened targeting restraints. Communication beyond kinetic force occurred through public announcements by both sides. The U.S. refusal to invade or directly attack the North Vietnamese capital of Hanoi or its key infrastructure also communicated the lack of U.S. will to prosecute the war.[64]

As with the Korean War, the U.S. did not fully mobilize the nation for the Vietnam War. President Johnson did not ask Congress for a formal declaration of war, desiring to maintain a balance between the funding of his "Great Society" domestic agenda and the prosecution of a politically dangerous and domestically unpopular conflict in Vietnam. There is no indication that this lack of economic and industrial mobilization for the war was detrimental to the war's outcome. It did, however, play a significant part in revealing the lack of U.S. will and American popular support to the North Vietnamese.

The U.S. also chose not to employ the psychological instrument of war during the Vietnam conflict, and the absence of a concerted campaign to sustain American support for the war was detrimental to the prosecution of the war. This was an intentional effort by the Johnson Administration to keep the focus on domestic reforms. In William O'Brien's words, there was "no sufficiently persuasive image of a dangerous enemy whose defeat was vital to U.S.

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[63]Ibid., 261.

[64]Ibid., 262-274.

security."[65] The absence of a clearly defined enemy left room for anti-war sentiment to reduce domestic support for the war. The American populace continued to support the Vietnam War for eight years, but its support was conditional on a clear victory or demonstrative progress.

The United State violated O'Brien's guideline of "fight-and-negotiate" by attempting to negotiate without adequate fighting to set the conditions for negotiations. The frequency and the urgency of U.S. calls for negotiations, and its offerings of holiday ceasefires created conditions unfavorable to the U.S., resulting in a "fight-and-plead for negotiations" strategy.[66] Near the end of the conflict, as the U.S. withdrew its combat troops, the U.S. found that the only instrument it possessed to apply pressure to the North Vietnamese was its overwhelming air power. With political restraints imposed on bombing targets within North Vietnam, little room was left to apply the force necessary to bring the North Vietnamese to the negotiation table.[67]

American military involvement in Vietnam took place in the context of the Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, which undermined the potential for third party mediation in the conflict. The United Nations was largely ineffectual in negotiating between the two Security Council seated superpowers, desiring to remain neutral in the struggle. The International Control Commission, which had mediated between the North Vietnamese and the French in 1954, with members from India, Canada, and Poland, chose not to fulfill that role in negotiations between the U.S. and North Vietnam. In the end, the U.S. and North Vietnam were forced to conduct bilateral negotiations, which proved cumbersome and protracted.[68]

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[65]Ibid., 270.

[66]Ibid., 273.

[67]Ibid., 271-274.

[68]Ibid., 274.

A Shift Towards Total Wars--Analysis of the U.S. in Afghanistan and Iraq

The United States has fought its most recent conflicts, Operation Enduring Freedom in 2001, and Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003, as limited wars with total, or unlimited, objectives. An analysis of these conflicts, using O'Brien's guidelines, demonstrates that these conflicts have failed to clearly define limited objectives, but have demanded the utmost in effort from United States adversaries, with no potential for accommodation in a negotiated settlement. The continued misapplication of and violation of these and other limited war guidelines imperils ongoing military missions in Afghanistan and Iraq today.

The political primacy of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq has been severely undermined at the strategic and operational levels. The control of military operations in both conflicts has been largely under the purview of American military commanders on the ground, with military officers, at times, branching out into political affairs and reconciliation issues. The administration of George W. Bush has been largely hands off in these matters, appearing to have taken a lesson from George H. W. Bush's level of involvement in Operation Desert Storm in 1992. This military centric focus is also demonstrated with the relative weight given to Congressional testimony by military commanders on the ground.

United States objectives for the conflict in Afghanistan were initially limited to the destruction of terrorist training camps and the capture or killing of Al Qaida top leadership. These objectives escalated to the removal of the Taliban regime and, eventually, to the promotion of democracy in Afghanistan--both total war objectives. Subsequent objectives have included issues in Afghani governance, human rights, and gender equality, drawing the U.S. into a long-term commitment for occupation and reconstruction of the state of Afghanistan.

The war against Iraq was framed with unlimited objectives, which included the removal of Saddam Hussein from power, the defeat of Iraqi military capabilities, to include alleged weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), and the capture of the Iraqi capital city of Baghdad. These

total war objectives could not have been written any more clearly than Clausewitz himself. After meeting these objectives and encountering an unconventional threat from an Iraqi insurgency, the U.S. further expanded its unlimited goals to include the democratization of Iraq and the promotion of democracy throughout the Middle East.

The unconventional employment of U.S. special operations forces in Afghanistan, in coordination with other governmental agencies (OGAs) and U.S. airpower, was a textbook approach to preserving economy of force in a limited conflict. Unfortunately, this strategy was out of necessity, rather than by design, given that alternative conventional plans were found to be unsatisfactory by civilian leadership.

The U.S. also sought to limit its military commitment and to economize its use of force in Operation Iraqi Freedom. Domestic debate over required troop concentrations continued well beyond the seizure of Baghdad, and became increasingly poignant in the resulting post-conflict occupation. The type of conventional forces committed, and the roles and missions they have been tasked with, has become the central issue, rather than the simple calculation of force ratios. The demands of the occupation and reconstruction of Iraq were largely different than the decisive defeat of Iraq's military capabilities sought during the initial ground war. Ultimately, the U.S. has violated the principle of economy of force with its military completely engaged in the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, leaving the nation without a strategic reserve for other contingencies. This grievous breach in military principles by senior civilian and military leaders has been deliberate and unapologetic, and violates O'Brien's guideline for maintaining flexible response capabilities to wage not only limited, but total war as well.

The rules of conflict for both Afghanistan and Iraq have been unilaterally imposed by the United States. After the initial demands for the Taliban to hand over Osama bin Laden and other Al Qaida leaders were not met, communication between the U.S. and its adversary reverted to kinetic military force. International support for the U.S. in the aftermath of the attacks of 11 September 2001, along with U.S. diplomatic efforts, prevented any other major power,

specifically Russia, from intervening in the conflict. U.S. military action has been limited to Afghanistan; however, the porous Afghanistan-Pakistan border has allowed sanctuary for Al Qaida and Taliban elements in Pakistan's Northwest Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Operation Enduring Freedom and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) International Security Assistance Force involvement have all been sanctioned by U.N. mandate, with NATO's commitment of forces providing additional legitimacy.

Under O'Brien's guidelines, the U.S. has self-imposed unilateral rules on the conduct of war in Iraq. Any pretension that the adversary will abide by these rules has been disregarded. There has been a considerable effort to ensure that the conflict does not escalate into a Sunni and Shia'a civil war within Iraq that could draw in neighboring states, spreading the span of the conflict. Additionally, the U.S. has purposefully not employed the psychological instrument of war in either conflict, but has rather made considerable effort to prevent the defining of the Iraqi and Afghani populations, or Muslims as "the enemy."

The United States has not fully mobilized the nation's industrial base, or its manpower base in support of operations in Afghanistan or Iraq. There is a contradiction in the "mobilization" question, given that the U.S. has mobilized its Reserve and National Guard forces to support ongoing operations. This has been largely due to the additional demands placed on unit rotations for Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Two key factors have affected the U.S.'s ability to employ a "fight-and-negotiate" method of limited war. Following failed attempts to convince the Taliban to meet U.S. initial demands, negotiations at the strategic and operational levels were set aside with military force directed at the total war objective of defeating the adversary's military capabilities and the removal of the regime. This was driven in large part by the U.S. declaration of unwillingness to negotiate with terrorists and that the U.S. considered state sponsors of terrorism as culpable along with the terrorists they support. Additionally, the pace of operations, and the swift collapse of opposition forces did not allow for a "fight-and-negotiate" tempo. The resultant method was

heavily reliant on fight-and-pursue, rather than negotiations to end the conflict. The pace of operations in Operation Iraqi Freedom also prevented third party negotiations prior to the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime.

The partial implementation of the elements of limited war strategy in Afghanistan is sharply contrasted with the absence of significant limitation in Operation Iraqi Freedom. Operation Iraqi Freedom was initiated under a total war construct for the removal of the Baath Party regime and Saddam Hussein, and continues to be waged towards this end with the reconstruction, development, and democratization of the Iraqi state. The decision to enter the war and its objectives were set by U.S. political leaders, but a conscious effort was made to allow military commanders to execute the campaign to its desired, swift conclusion.

Other Nations and Limited War

> Consequently, in making the decision to go to war, the government did not consider the whole range of options, including that of continuing the policy of 'containment,' or combining political and diplomatic moves with military strikes below the 'escalation level', or military preparations without immediate military action--so as to maintain for Israel the full range of responses to the abduction. This failure reflects weakness in strategic thinking, which derives the response to the event from a more comprehensive and encompassing picture.
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> Some the declared goals of the war were not clear and could not be achieved, and in part were not achievable by the authorized modes of military action. . . . Even after these facts became known to the political leaders, they failed to adapt the military way of operation and its goals to the reality on the ground. On the contrary, declared goals were too ambitious, and it was publicly stated that fighting would continue until they were achieved.[69]

Limited war is not just an American strategy for waging war. Other countries have turned to limited war when the circumstances have been appropriate. A discussion of two examples, one from China and one from Israel, and an examination of a recent doctrinal change to a limited war

[69]Haaretz Staff, "The Winograd Report: The Main Findings of the Winograd Partial Report on the Second Lebanon War," 5 January 2007, https://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/854051.html (accessed 24 March 2008).

strategy for the Indian military are helpful in understanding how other nations have used, or anticipate using limited war in modern conflict.

China's 1979 punitive incursion into the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and Israel's 2006 war in Southern Lebanon against Hezbollah fighters both involved cross-border attacks by a more powerful state against a supposedly weaker state in order to reduce perceived armed threats. The conflicts also had a significant bent towards signaling to the attacked state and other regional and international parties that overshadowed the actual fighting. The Chinese war with Vietnam was a communication with the Vietnamese government, the Soviet Union, and the United States, and the month long war in Lebanon served to communicate Israel's position with Hezbollah, the Lebanese government, the international community within the United Nations, and Hezbollah's supporter Iran.

1979 Chinese-Vietnamese War

The border region between China and Vietnam had been a source of tension well before 1979. Allegations of attacks on Chinese populations within Vietnam, and cross-border attacks by Vietnamese forces led China to conduct a "self-defense counterattack"[70] in February 1979. The conflict had significant international implications as the Soviets and Vietnamese continued to solidify their relationship after the American withdrawal from Vietnam, and this close relationship was seen as a threat to China. The conflict also had the potential to strengthen U.S. and Chinese diplomatic ties with a reciprocal visit to the U.S. by the Chinese head of state, Deng Ziaoping within this same year.[71] The cross-border attack was also seen as a way of relieving

[70]Zhang Xiaoming, "China's 1979 War with Vietnam: A Reassessment," *The China Quarterly*, no. 184 (December 2005): 860.

[71]Harlan W. Jencks, "China's 'Punitive' War on Vietnam: A Military Assessment," *Asian Survey* 19, no. 8 (August 1979): 802.

pressure on the Chinese supported Khmer Rouge in Cambodia who the Vietnamese were already fighting along that border.

The punitive incursion into Vietnam was to be a limited one in objectives sought, duration, and intensity.[72] Chinese leadership understood the delicate balance that had to be struck in respect to the timing of the attack and the intensity of the conflict. A window of opportunity for the attack existed that would be open after the spring thaw in the north, which would prevent the Soviets from intervening with their own attack, and prior to the flooding season in Vietnam that might impede the Chinese attack and planned withdrawal. Therefore, the Chinese had to consider two fronts, one offensive against the Vietnamese, and the second a defensive one along the border with Russia.[73]

China sought two strategic objectives in their conflict with the Vietnamese. The first was to communicate with the Vietnamese government the sincerity of China's displeasure with the Vietnamese treatment of Chinese along the border, and the second was the objective of bloodying the Vietnamese Army (VNA). The operational objectives for the People's Liberation Army (PLA) were the capture several provincial capitals and the threatening of the major approach route leading to Hanoi. The PLA was to halt operations at the southernmost provincial capital of Long San, and then destroy Vietnamese gun emplacements and military complexes as it withdrew back across the border.[74] The limitation of these objectives was driven by both political and practical military concerns. Chinese anti-aircraft defenses could only protect ground forces out to 50 kilometers from the Chinese-Vietnamese border, with Hanoi's air defense system prohibiting any support from the Chinese air force beyond that distance.[75]

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[72]Zhang, 860.

[73]Zhang, 855-859.

[74]Jencks, 801-804.

[75]Ibid., 808-809.

According to Chinese doctrine, the attack was to be made with superior forces that would conduct "quick-decision battles of annihilation"[76] against Vietnamese regular forces, allowing the Chinese to operate in a set piece battle, depleting the VNA's capabilities. Instead of fighting Vietnamese regulars, the Chinese encountered border units supported by irregulars and local militia groups, which were supported by VNA artillery. The restrictive mountain terrain made a conventional thrust with Chinese armored units impractical, and the urban fighting that developed in the provincial capitals proved difficult for the PLA. The Chinese forces were ill-trained for this kind of battle given that most of their duties had been related to agricultural work and border enforcement since the Korean War. The battle hardened Vietnamese forces proved more capable than anticipated by the Chinese.[77]

The Chinese did not fully mobilize for the conflict, and the forces that did participate were employed in an economy of force role. Chinese forces were also deployed in the north in anticipation of an attack by Soviet forces. The Chinese did utilize the propaganda machine within China to promote the psychological instrument for support for a war against an enemy which many Chinese would have normally considered their friendly neighbors. The decision not to mobilize and the difficulty in producing a "war spirit" in the population necessitated a short and decisive victory.[78]

The rules of the conflict were established initially by the Chinese legal justification for the war by declaring it a "self-defense counterattack." The Chinese also sought to keep the geographic span of the conflict limited to the border region with the expressed intent to withdraw and not to retain any Vietnamese territory. The rules were further refined by the Chinese decision not to use its air force or its navy in the war. Aircraft were placed on strip alert and the navy was

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[76]Zhang, 857.

[77]Zhang, 865-869.

[78]Jencks, 810.

sent on maneuvers, but neither service saw combat.[79] China sought to avoid direct conflict with the Soviet Union and succeeded, although it did prepare for its potential. The duration of the conflict precluded a "fight-and-negotiate" methodology, and the publicly expressed intention to withdraw after its objectives were met, left little room for pressure to mount on the Vietnamese government. Third party mediation did not occur for the same reasons.

The PLA was able to achieve their operational objectives, at a higher cost than anticipated. The Chinese withdrew shortly after taking Long San. The Chinese military gained valuable, if not costly experience in combat, and the Chinese government was able to achieve some strategic advantage from the conflict. However, the conflict ended with no final determination of a victor, with the Vietnamese rebuilding their military along the border, and with tension still present along the demarcation line.[80] This is the very nature of limited war.

2006 Israel-Hezbollah War in Lebanon

The Israeli war in southern Lebanon in 2006 was fought with Hezbollah guerrillas along another border region that was not only a source of tension, but that had also been the battlefield of previous conflicts. The Israeli government initiated air strikes and ground raids into southern Lebanon after three Israeli soldiers were captured by Hezbollah fighters in a cross border raid and then taken into Lebanon. Hezbollah forces countered with rocket attacks into Israeli territory and ambushes on Israeli raiding forces. The capability of Hezbollah forces to continue their rocket barrage of Israel, and an unprecedented missile attack on an Israeli naval vessel prompted the Israeli government to order a full-scale ground invasion by Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). The advance of this attack was to be limited to the Litani River where many of the Hezbollah rocket

[79]Ibid., 807-808.

[80]Ibid., 814.

launches originated. The IDF was ill prepared for the fight required to secure the Israeli objectives.[81]

Years of interdicting terrorists and fighting internal unrest left the IDF unprepared for a conventional, cross-border attack into Lebanon. There was no logistical structure in place to support such an operation. Distributed operations in fixed sites had created a requirement for a different supply system than one for this kind of operation. This disconnect with logistics was demonstrated with the shortage of food, water, and medical support reaching frontline forces during the conflict.[82]

Additionally, there was a heavy reliance on third party interference to conclude the conflict, but the short duration left little room for "fight-and-negotiate" strategy. The Israeli government believed that political discourse would occur after the IDF had quickly achieved its operational objectives. The Israeli incursion was able to draw international attention to the threat posed to Israel by Hezbollah and its political and material supporter Iran. The conflict was also instrumental in producing condemnation for Hezbollah activities from predominantly Sunni Arab countries like Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt, all concerned with Iran's influence over Hezbollah.[83]

Studies of the 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah conflict are still fresh, and there has not yet been a comprehensive analysis of the war to date. However, a great deal can be surmised from recent articles and initial analysis that has been written. With all of Israel's other threats, the Lebanese operation was certainly planned as an economy of force mission. The conflict was intended to be

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[81]David Makovsky and Jeffrey White, Policy Focus #60, *Lessons and Implications of the Israel-Hizballah War: A Preliminary Assessment* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2006), 8-9.

[82]Yaakov Katz, "IDF Report Card," *The Jerusalem Post*, Online Edition (24 August 2006), www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=11545525936817&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle (accessed 28 August 2007).

[83]Makovsky, 27-28.

confined to the Lebanese border region, preferably on the Lebanese side of the border.[84] Hezbollah proved capable of attacking the Israeli homeland, but the conflict remained geographically confined to the two states, although excluding Lebanese military forces. The original kidnappings and the continuing rocket attacks against Israel were used as justification for introducing Israeli ground forces, but there was no general mobilization of Israeli forces for the fight in Lebanon.[85]

The Chinese attack into Vietnam was a punitive incursion to weaken the VNA and to signal China's resolve to deal with the perceived Vietnamese threat. The Israeli offensive into Lebanon was also an attempt to punish Hezbollah and to signal to the Lebanese government, and the international community, that the threat posed by Hezbollah was real. Neither of these examples of limited war constituted military success for the state. The difficulties experienced by both Chinese and Israeli military forces demonstrated their lack of preparedness for the limited war that their political leadership had committed them to. This lack of preparedness included a lack of adequate training, improper organizational structures, and poor intelligence on their potential adversaries. Despite these setbacks, both the Chinese and the Israelis achieved their strategic objectives, albeit at the higher cost of lives and time than had been anticipated. Both states were able to achieve these political goals with the effects from military force.

Despite the tactical and operational errors made, both of these conflicts hold valuable lessons for the employment of force in the form of strategic raids and punitive incursions to achieve political ends. They go beyond mere air strikes and place direct pressure on the adversary by presenting the loss of non-organic territories, or organic territories without strategic importance. Both conflicts present lessons for the U.S. to learn as it is faced with the need to apply direct pressure to a state without threatening total war ends.

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[84]Katz.

[85]Makovsky, 10-13.

Indian Cold Start Doctrine of Limited War

The Indian Army announced a new limited war doctrine in April 2004 after a perceived shortfall in its former doctrine, which called for a massive conventional retaliation against its adversary Pakistan in the event of hostilities. Both India and Pakistan are nuclear powers and have been able to remain below the nuclear threshold, despite the nearly five-decade old conflict regarding the disputed border region of Kashmir. India has accused Pakistan of waging a "proxy war" in Kashmir to undermine Indian security. An attack on the Indian Parliament building in New Dehli by Kashmiri militants in December 2001 caused the mobilization of the Indian Army, with orders to prepare for retaliatory attacks into Kashmir and Pakistan.[86]

The inability of the Indian Army to quickly mobilize and deploy to the border for offensive operations severely contradicted the standing Indian "Sundarji doctrine," which called for large scale, lightning retaliatory attacks by armored "strike corps" into Kashmir. These strike corps took nearly three weeks to deploy to the international border in response to their mobilization, negating the element of surprise for the operation. The army's review of these operations determined that a new doctrine was needed. The Indian Army has labeled this new limited war doctrine "Cold Start" for its potential to allow India to react quickly in the event of Pakistani aggression.[87]

The Cold Start doctrine was unveiled in April 2004, calling for a capability to launch multiple strikes into Pakistan along different axes of advance to make shallow territorial gains that could be used in post conflict negotiations. The specific details of the doctrine remain classified, but the general concept is for the Indian military to divest itself of the large, cumbersome armor strike corps by creating smaller, more agile, division-sized "integrated battle

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[86]Walter C. Ladwig III, "A Cold Start for Hot Wars? The Indian Army's New Limited War Doctrine," *International Security* 32, no. 3 (Winter 2007): 158-190.

[87]Ibid., 158-162.

groups" (IBGs) that would be supported by the Indian Air Force and naval aviation for fire support. Along with the goal of taking territory to exchange during post conflict negotiations, there is the additional aim of delivering a severe blow to the Pakistani Army, while avoiding damage to civilian population centers.[88]

There are international and regional concerns over the Indian implementation of the Cold Start doctrine. The first concern is the potential for escalation of the conflict beyond the original limited objectives. This concern is directly related to the nuclear capabilities of both states, and the potential for misperceptions regarding the actions being taken in a limited war construct.[89] Without a clear communication of Indian intent for the doctrine, and actions taken under that doctrine, the Pakistani military could perceive Indian actions as a direct threat to the survival of Pakistan, and react with a total war response.

The second concern centers on the Indian government's control of the Indian military, and whether a limited war doctrine will give the Indian military a larger role in decision making if the two countries become involved in a crisis situation in the future. The principles of civilian control of the government appear to be well established with the Indian military. However, analysts believe that this oversight is largely non-existent during peacetime in the development of security issues.[90] This leaves room for disconnect concerning the objectives established for a limited war with Pakistan. Without clearly defined, limited goals, accidental escalation to total war remains a possibility.

Cold Start remains in the experimental phase nearly four years after the Indian military's announcement of a doctrinal change. There is little evidence that the organizational and infrastructure changes have been made to ready units for executing operations under this doctrine,

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[88]Ibid., 164-165.

[89]Ibid., 172.

[90]Ibid., 171.

and the conceptual aspects of Cold Start have only been tested in five war games that have continued to reveal shortfalls in Indian capabilities and command and control for the doctrine's implementation. This slow moving process has helped to maintain the stability between India and Pakistan in the meantime.

Conclusion

> As soon as they tell me it (war) is limited, it means that they do not care whether you achieve a result or not, as soon as they tell me, "surgical," I head for the bushes.[91]
>
> General Colin Powell,
> *The American Culture of War*

Despite the U.S. military's aversion to fighting limited wars, conflicts involving the United States have been predominantly limited in nature since the end of World War II. In waging these conflicts, the U.S. has been successful in complying with nearly all of William O'Brien's guidelines for limited war, save one--clearly defined, limited objectives. This disregard for limited aims and goals has been driven primarily by the success the U.S. has enjoyed in its most recent conflicts. Ground wars lasting less than 100 hours have lulled the U.S. into a false sense of military superiority. These successes have not only created a cultural mindset for decisive victory within the U.S. military, but an expectation within the American populace for swift and effortless victories in war.

The choice to wage war with a limited war strategy should be a deliberate decision with an understanding of the theory of limited war, and what must be considered to implement it with success. This paper has provided a description of the evolution of limited war theory and historical examples, which can be used to re-introduce these concepts into the vernacular of contemporary debate. There are themes that have been identified within the theory and throughout the historical case studies. These themes include; that limited war is contextual,

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[91]Lewis, 383.

politically deliberate, objectives dependent, matched to force capabilities, and clearly communicated, in words and deeds, as limited, to both the adversary and the American populace.

The theorists discussed, all agree that limited war is contextual, given that it is an alternative, amongst others, for a strategy in waging war. It is best seen as *a* way, not *the* only way, to fight modern conflicts. Limited war is a tool to be used when that specific tool is required, and not to be indiscriminately applied. There remains Corbett's higher, more difficult road of total war, when the circumstances require such a war.

The contextual nature of limited war also pertains to the perception of the belligerents involved in the conflict. The United State's limited objectives for the Vietnam War ran contradictory to the Vietnamese total objectives sought. It is not enough to limit political objectives, but those objectives must be articulated in word and deed to the adversary in order for the conflict to be limited in nature. In addition to understanding the enemy's military capabilities, it is equally important to understand those objectives, which he is seeking for the conflict, and whether his strategy will match with the implementation of limited war strategy and the employment of limited war forces.

However, there are advantages to employing a limited war strategy to achieve political objectives. The primary advantage is that limited war maintains the political primacy of the conflict. The political choice of limited objectives, and the continuous evaluation of those objectives to determine their validity, preserves the political nature of the conflict. Total wars, in contrast, with their objective to completely defeat the adversary, endanger this political control, particularly in a "fight-and-negotiate" system. With total war, politics and diplomacy are chained until these unlimited objectives are reached. Limited war allows policy to retain its power over the military instrument of force.

A strategy for limited war must be matched with force capabilities to wage limited wars. After the failure to limit objectives, this would be the second biggest, and most common, blunder made in implementing a limited war strategy. The belief that general-purpose forces can fulfill all

tasks and missions is the root cause of the miscalculation of force capabilities requirements for this or any other strategy. The U.S. Army's current Transformation initiatives towards smaller, more deployable, Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs) is a step in the right direction for creating limited war forces, but these BCTs must also contain the capabilities to continually exert pressure during the negotiate period of "fight-and-negotiate." These capabilities include adequate firepower, logistics, and protection capabilities to allow the force to sustain itself during potential operational pauses.

However, these BCTs are currently fully committed to operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and a strategic reserve does not exist to reconstitute forces that would be necessary to fight another, limited war. There is presently a gap in capabilities that would preclude the U.S. from implementing a limited war strategy if it were necessary to do so. There is also the need for mobility assets currently dedicated to ongoing conflicts. Increasing both air and sea deployment capabilities is necessary to enable limited forces to be employed where they are needed. The force structure that the United States Army is moving towards has the potential to successfully fight limited wars, if these forces are available to deploy for this purpose. An absence of this capability necessitates the U.S. reliance on other forces, to include nuclear forces, which exceed the threshold of many conflicts that could emerge.

Along with organizational and capabilities requirements, change within the U.S. military culture is also required if the U.S. is to succeed in using limited war strategies in the future. The preceding quote by General Powell is indicative of the misinterpretation of limited war by even the most senior levels of the U.S. military. There is a need to refine the U.S. military culture and its training to include the potential for conflicts waged under proper limited war strategies. A fundamental shift in the military's mindset from a strictly total war emphasis to that of one accepting the theory and the guidelines of limited war is also required.

Military officers and political leadership must understand that the defeat or annihilation of an enemy is not necessarily the purpose or objective in every conflict. In the future, the U.S.

military may be required to utilize its dominance in communications and its networked forces to halt operations, rather than to coordinate its race towards total objectives. This halt may be necessary to allow for political negotiations to occur, and will necessitate U.S. commanders to assume a defensive posture unwelcome in the current U.S. military culture. Commanders may be required to take ground and wait for the political process to take its course, while still exerting pressure in Julian Corbett's second stage of the limited war operation. It will take some time before this posture and its associated mindset will be accepted as part of full spectrum operations. Therefore, there is a need to re-introduce the concepts of limited war and "fight-and-negotiate" within U.S. military training and education, to include simulations that require military leaders to fully capitalize on operational pauses created by a political requirement.

Along with changes in the U.S. military culture, change must also occur in the expectations of the American populace concerning limited wars. Americans must gain an understanding of limited war and accept that the nation will not always be fighting for a complete, decisive victory in the conflicts it enters. This maturing process must be aided by political leadership. Political leaders must clearly communicate the limited objectives for a conflict to develop this understanding and to manage the expectations of the American people. The nation's policy to not negotiate with terrorists and their sponsors must also be critically considered, and not grafted wholesale onto the "more forceful methods of negotiations" with adversaries in limited wars.

U.S. political leadership must also consider O'Brien's rule of third party mediation as essential to limited war in the future. Presently, the U.S. has sought to gain legitimacy through the formation of international coalitions and specifically through sanctions and resolutions from the United Nations. These actions are detrimental to the successful execution of limited war strategies which requires that an impartial, third-party to exist in order to facilitate mediation and negotiation between the belligerents. The difficulty of negotiations between the U.S. and the Vietnamese is one example where the absence of this third party prolonged the conflict.

By acting under U.N. approval, the U.S. is undermining both its efforts to apply force for negotiations, and undermining the U.N.'s legitimacy as an honest broker and mediator of peace. The counter-intuitive argument is that the U.S. should consider unilateral action, when justifiable; in order to allow the U.N., or other state or agency, to serve as a mediator in future limited wars.

Limited war remains a viable tool for waging modern war. It is necessary for the U.S. to maintain the capabilities to wage limited war, which includes the requisite knowledge and familiarity with its proper implementation, given that the nation is likely to be involved, either directly or indirectly, with limited wars in the future. To execute a limited war strategy, its value and its limitations must first be understood. Key to gaining this understanding is the re-introduction of limited war theory and strategy into the vernacular of political and military leaders.

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